

Dhamma Questions & Responses

by Ajahn Buddhādāsa

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu (sk)

A Dhamma session offered at Suan Mokkh on 9 February 1991

In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)

Whenever the subject of reincarnation, near-death experiences, channeling, etc., comes up, teachers here at Suan Mokkh say that they are not interested in such things or that such things are not important. Yet Dhamma encourages study and investigation of all that is Dhamma, to see things as they really are. Perhaps if we understood not-self as a higher self that is not separate from anything and therefore always changing, we could begin to see the benefit of studying these things. I don't profess to have an answer, but I think it's important not to ignore these important subjects so that we can see the way things are. Could you comment on this?

When we speak about 'reincarnation' we must understand that there are two meanings to the word. The first meaning of 'reincarnation' is in people language – the way that ordinary people speak. In this way of speaking, reincarnation means that there is a physical death. One dies and is put in a coffin, and then gets buried or cremated. And then that same thing is reborn, born into another body. So reincarnation in the ordinary sense means the death of a physical body and then something being born again in another physical body.

However in Dhamma language, 'reincarnation' has a different meaning. It has nothing to do with physical death. It simply means the rebirth of the ego – of the 'self' concept in the mind – whenever ignorance stirs up dependent origination.

If you're speaking of some physical death and then physical birth and then physical death and then physical birth, that's not really any particular problem. If there's physical death and then some birth or incarnation in another body, then the same problems, the same kind of problems will exist. And they have to be dealt with in the same way that we deal with our problems right here and now. So there's nothing really strange or extraordinary if there is some kind of physical rebirth or reincarnation.

However if we speak in terms of Dhamma, in terms of the mind, there is reincarnation every time that the concept 'I' – the 'me' concept, the ego – arises in the mind. And this happens many many times, not only in a lifetime but in a day. This ego can get reincarnated many many times. So don't say that there's no reincarnation. There is, and it's happening very often. And whenever this reincarnation of ego occurs in the mind, then we must deal with it. It's not a matter of the future, but a matter of the present to be dealt with properly. Even better, if we practice correctly it won't be reincarnated. And then the problems it brings won't develop. So our task is to practice correctly here and now so this constant reincarnation of egos won't happen.

So we need to understand there are two meanings to the word 'reincarnation.' The physical materialistic meaning existed before Buddhism was widely taught, before the Buddha appeared. But in the Buddha's teaching there is the reincarnation of ego which is the central issue – the mental or spiritual reincarnation of the delusive ego concept in the mind.

The teaching or idea of physical reincarnation existed in India before the Buddha's time. It's possible that it existed even earlier, possibly in Egypt and elsewhere – some doctrine of self, of soul or whatever that is reincarnated many many times. In fact there is nothing special about this kind of teaching. However, it has certain benefits... However, it cannot end suffering. *Dukkha* cannot be quenched by this kind of understanding. But still, it has benefits. There are certain moral benefits to this doctrine. A belief in reincarnation can be used to encourage people to do good and to avoid doing bad. But belief in this will not end dukkha.

In the Buddha's teaching the emphasis is on the mental-spiritual birth of ego, of self, of egoism in the mind. And this is where the problems occur. Every time there is this kind of birth, there is a problem. There is heaviness. There is burning. There is dukkha. Now when a child is born from the mother's womb, that physical birth isn't yet the problem. The newborn child doesn't experience

dukkha. It's only later when the child is able to form the concept of 'me' – to cling to 'me' and 'mine' – that the ego is born. And it's this birth that's the starting of dukkha. This is when the dukkha happens. So the end of dukkha can only come through an understanding of this mental or spiritual rebirth. So this is the rebirth or reincarnation that needs to be understood. This is the one that is necessary and important.

Even if you have some evidence of one person being reincarnated many times, even if one could go and prove that there has been somebody reincarnated, it doesn't really change anything. This knowledge might be interesting, but it isn't of any real help because it can't be used to quench dukkha. The problem is one of the mind, not one of the body. So the understanding that will end dukkha is the understanding of mental reincarnation.

The thing about physical reincarnation – there are actually a number of passages talking about this in the Pāli scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism. However, we suspect that these are Hindu influences rather than things proper to the Buddha's teaching itself. Because what the Buddha focused on is [that] our problems arise when there is egoistic birth – when there is this birth in the mind of ego, of self and selfishness. This is where the problems arise and so this is where we must solve the problem. To prevent the reincarnation of this kind of birth which happens through ignorance – through attachment, the birth of egoism – or at least to control this birth so it doesn't become dukkha. This is the only way we can absolutely quench dukkha. It can't be done by believing or trying to understand physical reincarnation.

Now some people – having looked at some of the Buddhist scriptures – see that there are numerous references to this person being reborn as this or as that, or maybe being reincarnated a number of times. And this leads them to some confusion about what the Buddha taught. Or that they take this to be the essence of the Buddha's teaching. One should be very careful here however. We believe that these passages which are claimed to be the Buddha are there for the sake of moral purposes. However these teachings are not what is called *paramattha-dhamma* (the supreme level of Dhamma). These moral teachings are on the ordinary level. They're for those people who cannot understand supreme Dhamma or the highest level of Dhamma.

On the highest level of Dhamma the Buddha spoke very clearly – unequivocally – that there is no self that could go and get reborn like that.

There's no *attā* [Pāli] or *ātman* [Sanskrit] – there's no *winyan* [Thai] or spirit of that sort – which goes traveling on from this life to the next. The Buddha made this point absolutely clear on the level of paramattha-dhamma. But there are people who can't understand that, and so it is necessary to have the more ordinary and easy to understand level of teaching. When people truly believe in reincarnation then this will encourage them to do good and to not do bad. So that's necessary but it won't end dukkha.

Be careful about things like the Jātaka stories, the so-called 'rebirth' stories. Some people take these too seriously. Where there's stories about a certain person being reborn over and over again, reincarnated in many many bodies. These stories are necessary – these kind of fables – as moral teachings for people who can't understand the more psychological or Dhamma approach. So these things are necessary but we should not be confused by them.

In the commentaries and sub-commentaries on the original scriptures there are tons of references to rebirth or reincarnation. They're full of them: such as this puppy went and got born as that Brahmin, or this hen is born as that female ogre, that ogress, and so on. These kind of references are there. They're often put in the mouth of the Buddha. But what needs to be understood is these kind of ideas were being taught to people who already believed them. The audience already firmly believed in these things. And the purpose of all these reincarnation stories is a moral one. But it's really not in the long run so useful because none of these stories will quench dukkha.

Dukkha arises out of ignorance, through clinging. In our minds there arises the egoistic concept and every time this happens there is dukkha. Every birth of ego brings dukkha and there is no avoiding this. Since the sole purpose of Buddhism is the ending of dukkha – the quenching of dukkha – then this is the Buddhist teaching on rebirth. For it to be a Buddhist teaching it needs to be directly relevant to the quenching of dukkha. And so we need to be interested in this mental or spiritual reincarnation of the ego in the mind.

In summary, the kind of physical birth or physical reincarnation... understanding of that cannot quench dukkha. But the kind of reincarnation of ego in the mind through ignorance – the ignorant rebirth of ego in the mind – understanding that can quench dukkha. With that knowledge we can quench dukkha here and now. We can end dukkha right now.

How can the Buddhist approach contribute to dealing with environmental problems?

(This is a totally different kind of question. It's a worldly, social, or political question.)

Buddhism teaches unselfishness. Buddhism is teaching unselfishness. When a person or when people are unselfish, then they won't destroy the forest. They won't pollute the air and the rivers. They won't go throwing garbage around and living in indulgent and exploitative dangerous ways. All the problems in this world – whether environmental, social, political or whatever – come from selfishness. When people stop being selfish they will stop acting selfishly and they won't create these problems. This applies to problems like drugs, crime, mental illness, political exploitation, chauvinism and various other forms of social and political problems. The root of all these social external problems is in selfishness. If we can eliminate the selfishness then all these problems can be solved.

Just one thing, unselfishness, can solve all problems in this world – problems on the social level, political level, economic problems, and all the other ecological problems and all of them – can be solved just with unselfishness.

Do you think that the world has any chance to survive? You know that there is war now, that there is hunger in developing countries. Is there a chance for the world to survive?

Yes there is a chance for survival. The thing that will allow the world to survive is what we were just talking about – unselfishness. Our chance for survival is to live unselfishly and to encourage others to do so. This is the only chance for survival. Manipulating or changing political and economic structures isn't enough. We need to use the Dhamma to end selfishness.

There won't be any problems left once there is no selfishness.

Could you please speak in more detail about the fruits of Dhamma practice which are benefits developed for the sake of others?

We summarize the benefits – the results of Dhamma practice – as being two basic things. One is the cool peace or the peaceful coolness in one’s own heart. And the second is benefits for others, being able to help others. When one has practiced Dhamma and transcended self, one therefore is totally free of selfishness. Then one’s own heart is cool and peaceful. And when there is no more selfishness, then we can truly care about others. When there’s still self, we care mainly about the self and only view others in terms of self. But when there’s no more self and selfishness, then we can really begin to be concerned about others and to help others. When there’s no more living selfishly, then we can live for the sake and benefit of others exclusively.

When there’s no more selfishness, one will help others automatically. Life can’t sit still. The nature of life is movement. So we can’t sit still. Once our personal matters are dealt with, then it’s automatic that one will give attention to the problems of others.

(SK: I then asked,)

Well how do we help others, how does one then help others?

However one has helped oneself, one helps others in the same way. Whatever way one has ended one’s own problems, one helps others to do the same – so that they can find the same coolness and peace.

The aim or goal of every religion is to help emancipate oneself and then to help emancipate others. Salvation or liberation for oneself and for others is the goal of all religions. So to the degree that one can save or liberate oneself, to that degree one helps others to do the same.

The thirteen basic lessons of ānāpānasati each describe doing something. Yet there’s a perception that people don’t do anything collectively and/or individually. Things just seem to happen.

(SK: I’m sorry it’s not clear what the question is. This seems to be a statement. Would you like to clarify what you are asking, whoever asked this one?)

If we die before realizing true detachment, how are we ever to reach Nibbāna?

If we die, this life ends without having realized Nibbāna – then we have wasted this life. We haven't really done anything of value with this life. We've wasted it by not realizing or receiving the highest thing there is to find in life.

This self which is not-self then hasn't received or realized the best, the highest thing there is in life. And then this life of that self which is not a self has been wasted. It hasn't gotten what it was intended to get. It hasn't realized what it was supposed to realize.

This can be taken as totally ordinary that people will live their entire lives without really getting anything out of it is quite common... or most common.

Can one practice Dhamma while doing the following: enjoying sex, enjoying good food, striving to lead an honorable life?

These situations can be lessons for Dhamma practice. While enjoying these things... or while receiving the pleasures and happiness of these things, one can study how that if we attach to any of these things – to the pleasure or to the doing or experiencing of these things – then that thing will bite. If we cling to sex, it will bite. If we cling to delicious food, it will bite. If we cling to our honor and reputation, it will bite. So we can use these as opportunities to learn that if one doesn't attach to these things, then they don't bite.

So Buddhism doesn't forbid you to do these things. But one studies them – one uses all these opportunities as lessons – in order to understand how attachment bites and how non-attachment doesn't bite. So the message isn't that you can't participate in such activities. The message is just that we need to do these things without getting bit by them. And the way to avoid getting bit is to not attach to them as 'me' and 'mine.'

One must look even further and more deeply to see that to spend time enjoying things is tiring. It's a useless waste of energy. It's better to not bother enjoying things. When we're not enjoying things – when there is not this effort to enjoy – then that is much more peaceful and we don't waste our energy. One ought to see this also.

This is partly what we meant the other day when we spoke about being above positive & negative – to be above good & evil, to not be clinging to enjoyment as positive. To be above all these things is the best.

Do ideals and beliefs have any place in Dhamma practice? For example, ideals about what kind of person we would like to be, belief in the goodness of people, belief in Dhamma, the ideas that led some of here, etc.

Ideals are necessary, but they must be ideals which are not wrong. If our ideals are wrong, it will just bring lots of problems. In Buddhism, this matter of ideals is called *sammā-dit̐thi*. It means to have the right ideals. And then when one's ideals are correct, then correct beliefs will follow from that. So you need to search for the right ideals – the ideals that will bring you only to peace, to the quenching of dukkha – rather than ideals that will bring on more problems. Ideals are necessary, but they must be right ideals.

And then belief follows from these ideals.

There are many different spiritual practices now and even several forms of Buddhism, as well as many teachers. How would Ajahn Buddhādāsa recommend choosing among the spiritual choices, the types of Buddhism and the different teachers?

This is a genuine question. This is one that touches on something that's very important.

First thing is to understand that all religions aim to help humanity. All the religions are trying to help human beings. Next one must realize that human beings haven't just kind of existed all at once, all in the same place, but that human beings have lived in different times and different places. Therefore each religion has occurred or arisen in order to help the people of a specific time and place. Or even within each religion, the different schools or sects or whatever – denominations – have arisen in order to respond to the needs of people in a particular time and place. For example people are of many different kinds. There's Asians, Europeans, Americans. There's people in the North, people in the South, and so on. And it's also important to recognize that people differ in

intelligence. There are people who are quite stupid, people who are just a little foolish, people who are intelligent, people who are less intelligent. And so each religion responds to a particular level of intelligence. So we must be careful not to confuse those. If you look in any religious passage or spiritual teaching – in each particular teaching – there's a kind of reasoning or a principle that's being pointed out in that passage. And if you understand the principle, then you can see whether it is appropriate for you, for your situation, for your intelligence, and so on.

So in summary, all religions aim to help people to end suffering. This is the purpose of all religions. However because people have lived in different times and places, the religions differ according to the times and places, and according to the different ranges of intelligence in cultures and in people. And then so one chooses the spiritual teachings that... once one understands the principle – the things you have to understand, the principle of the teaching, the natural causes and effects of that teaching – and then you will know what is appropriate for you to practice. Don't worry about being a Buddhist, a Christian, a Hindu or any of that. You don't have to choose to be a Buddhist. You don't have to convert to Islam or any of that. That's way too superficial way of looking at it. But just understand the principle, the natural causes and conditions of each teaching, and then you'll know of whether or not it applies to you.

In Buddhism there is only one principle – the principle of cutting all attachment to 'me' and 'mine.' This is the principle of Buddhism. And it is the same in all the schools and forms of Buddhism. Whether in China, Japan, Tibet, Korea or wherever, this is the single principle of Buddhism. However, when Buddhism has gone into those different countries, it has been necessary to explain this principle in ways appropriate to those countries. Sometimes it's necessary to kind of borrow some of the culture or some of the ways of speaking – some of the imagery and beliefs from each of those countries – in order to make the teaching more accessible or more familiar. But... and so different forms of Buddhism in different countries may explain things differently than the way they're being explained here. Although the method of explanation may be different, the principle is always the same. Otherwise it isn't really Buddhism.

Now a further thing that's even more important, is... one must consider whether the intention is to lead an individual to liberation or to lead everyone to liberation. If the intention is to help individuals to liberation, the teaching will

take one form. If the intention is to lead everyone, then the teaching takes another form. And so this is the difference between Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. However the intention... both approaches have good intentions – the intention to help people get free of *dukkha*.

About forty or fifty years ago there were lots of books floating around on Buddhism in Thailand, Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Buddhism in Burma, Buddhism in China, Buddhism in Japan, and so on. But when we read these books, it was mainly about the culture of each particular country – Thai culture, Sri Lankan culture, Japanese culture, and whatever. None of these books were really about Buddhism itself. But they were about the cultural beliefs, the customs, the traditions, the superstitions, the kind of occult practices of those different countries which Buddhism had to intermix with. That was the state of affairs forty-fifty years ago – all these books really just about culture and external matters, not books about Buddhism itself.

Now though we've gotten over our foolishness and we've been able to remove a lot of those coverings, those cultural and external things which have been kind of surrounding Buddhism. We've been able to get rid of those and focus directly on Buddhism itself which is the same in all places

There is just one Buddhism – to destroy the stupidity that there is 'self,' to destroy the ignorance or foolishness that there is 'self.'

In Thailand, Buddhist practice seems to include what can only be regarded as superstitious belief, such as setting free birds to take away ill-fortune, making offerings and burning incense in the hope of gaining worldly success. How is this reconciled with the practice of Dhamma as taught here at Suan Mokkh?

As we've said, the sole purpose or principle of Buddhism is getting rid of and destroying 'self.' Now these various things that you've mentioned are more a matter of Thai practice than Buddhist practice. You need to understand that what people in Thailand are doing has many sources other than Buddhism. There are the ancient Thai beliefs that go back to way before Buddhism arrived. And then there are Brahmanistic and Hindu influences, as well as Confucianist and others. Throughout the long history of Thai culture there have been all these different things.

People in Thailand, like anywhere else, come in many different forms – with different levels of intelligence, different inclinations, habits, and so on. And so to please all the different kinds of people there have been many different beliefs and practices developed. Some of them come from ancient Thai beliefs – animism and things like that. Others come from Brahmanism and Hinduism. And some come from Buddhism. In Thai culture these have all been blended together and many people mistakenly call this Buddhism. But as we’ve pointed out, all these kind of admixtures are not Buddhism. They’re just the external trappings – not Buddhism itself. If you understand this point, you won’t need to ask these questions.

And the true orthodoxy of Buddhism is simply destroying self – eliminating all vestiges of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ And so one needs to separate all those traditional practices, observances, and commitments from the religion. And then one will find the true religion.

This problem happens in fact to all religions. All the world’s religions have this problem of all kinds of things getting stuck on to the basic core of religion. So learn to separate the two. Remove the non-essential and you will find the true religion.

Actually there is just one religion – the religion of nature. If we do this, this happens. If we do this, this happens. If we do that, that happens. This is the religion of nature and knowing what to do so that dukkha doesn’t arise – knowing what to do so that dukkha is thoroughly quenched. This is the natural religion. It is safer, more correct, more scientific, more straightforward. This religion of nature is the one true religion.

The laws of dependent origination, the law of conditionality (*idappaccayatā*) which you’ve been learning about at the meditation center, these belong to nature. Don’t think that these belong to Buddhism or that they belong to the Buddha. The Buddha just discovered these things. He doesn’t own them. They don’t belong to Buddhism or the Buddha. They belong only to nature.

I’m the one who asked the first question this morning and I wish in retrospect that I hadn’t put the word ‘reincarnation’ in there. I see again the importance

of formulating a question. The question really has to do with how do we explain things that occur without using something beyond non-self?

Let me give an example. It's pretty well known that there are things that occur to people such as finding out the death of a loved one without being told. We're beginning to study this more and more as time goes on. And how can we explain these phenomena without an idea of something beyond this plane? And is this then idea of a 'higher self' – or call it what you will, the words aren't important – is it in conflict really with the Buddhist idea of not-self? Do you understand my question? It feels real hard to formulate it.

Okay, we can accept that there is reincarnation. Therefore we need to destroy the individual, we need to get rid of the individual or thing that gets reincarnated. Whatever it is getting reincarnated, that's what we need to get rid of.

The fundamental issue is this issue of the egoism that creates dukkha and ending that. As for some of the other matters that you've brought up, if you want to explain them, then you could explain them according to the flow of mind or the stream of mind. One needn't refer to any kind of self.

The stream of mind – the stream of consciousness – exists or flows without their needing to be a self.

As we've said before, there's just body and mind. There's no third thing. There's no self. But through the stream of mind it's possible to know distant things. Other things can be done by the stream of mind.

Some matters concerning the mind are so strange that they're unexplainable. Some things that happen, or some of these mental things, are impossible to explain.

For example, one friend in one country is experiencing dukkha. And then a friend in another country can know that the friend is experiencing dukkha. This thing can happen. It's rather common. But still the form of dukkha is basically the same.

But the essential point is not how this happens. What matters is this person is suffering. This person is in dukkha.

This kind of ability to know that a distant friend is in dukkha – this is very common.

This has happened to myself two or three times. A friend was suffering quite a bit and I knew this. It was kind of like an image or a dream.

The form of the suffering in each case may not be the same. But what matters is that person is suffering.

And this is known by the stream of mind, not by some *attā*, ‘soul’ or something like that.

[SK rephrases the original question.]

As for this thing about ‘higher self’ or whatever it’s called – whether it conflicts with the principle of *anattā* or not – it’s best not to speak of some higher self. It’s better just to speak of the mind which is developing itself higher and higher. It’s better just to speak in terms of the mind and not bring in the word ‘self’ because the word ‘self’ can only lead to confusion. So just speak of the mind that’s training and developing higher and higher. Even if we use some terms or some terms are used such as the ‘supreme thing’ or ‘supreme being,’ be very careful not to understand these words in terms of self or being some kind of self. Just understand it in terms of the mind which is developing higher and higher. The highest development of the mind is to be totally free of self. And so, why bring in self? Or be careful about bringing self into the discussion.

This kind of problem or confusion exists quite a bit in India because India has received both the Hindu teaching and the Buddhist teaching. The Hindu teaching teaches some supreme self but Buddhism doesn’t teach that. And so people in India are speaking the languages of two religions and sometimes they’re intermixed. This can lead to confusion.

For example, some people believed in the ‘supreme self.’ They wanted to find the supreme self. And so when they talked to the Buddha, the Buddha said we’ll practice Dhamma like this and this, and you will find the supreme self. So people would use this language and the Buddha could work appropriately with their way of speaking. And so those who want the ‘*mahā-ātman*’ or the ‘great *attā*’ – the great self, the supreme self, the highest self, whatever – he would say ‘well then one must practice Dhamma like this.’ Instances like this appear in the Buddhist scriptures.

If we remove all of these kinds of stories and concerns, then there remains just the one issue of quenching dukkha – ending dukkha. How are we going to end dukkha here and now? And then one must end the self. One must eliminate

attaching to I and mine. Then there is just one thing, very simple, if we remove this other stuff.

The idea or the words about a ‘higher self,’ this kind of idea is everywhere because it’s just what people want. People feel that there is a self – that they’ve got a self – and they want it to be better. Everybody naturally wants a better self. And so this kind of thinking and talking is common everywhere. You’ll find it in all religions – this wanting to have a better self, a higher self.

If one wonders and worries whether this thing, this higher self exists or not, it will take up a lot of time. It’s much more straight-forward and efficient just to ask: how do we quench dukkha? how do we get free of dukkha?

In your first talk you said, ‘love is dukkha.’ You talked of ‘love biting its owner.’ Is that always so? Please tell us more about love.

A few words were left out. One should say ‘the love that is attached to as ‘me’ or ‘mine’ – that love bites its owner.’ The love that is attached to bites its owner. The same is true of non-love. Whether loving or not loving, if it’s attached to as ‘me’ or ‘mine’ it bites its owner.

We shouldn’t forget these words ‘attached to as *me* and *mine*.’ Don’t forget that anything that is attached to as ‘me’ and ‘mine’ will bite its owner. Everything that we attach to or regard as being ‘me’ and ‘mine’ will bite its owner.

Further, one can live with things, use things, eat things, be involved with things without attaching to them as ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ And then they don’t bite their owner.

Comparing Christianity and Buddhism, I see a lot of parallels. Now if someone really practices being a Christian – a follower of Jesus – do you think that he can in that way end all suffering and reach coolness?

Yes, and he or she will be a good Buddhist as well by removing all *attā*, all ‘self.’ This Christian will redeem him- or herself by redeeming the *attā*, by

getting rid of all self. Then that person is both a good Buddhist and a good Christian.

One needn't commit suicide. You don't have to kill yourself. Just give up the concept of self. Redeem oneself by getting rid of self. It isn't necessary to commit suicide.

Jesus Christ demonstrated this principle to the greatest extreme so that even the biggest fool could understand the principle of sacrificing self.

I understand that the practice of ānāpānasati is the path which leads to non-concocting and the cessation of dukkha. As a beginner, however, my understanding is still intellectual. And while I have become aware that there is a state of not-self, of not-concocting, I find that I am still stirred up by positive & negative. And my concocting mind is very strong. I don't know how long it will take me to develop to the point where I can be like the Arahant where positive and negative still exist but it won't concoct my mind. Do you have any suggestions for what I can do in my everyday life – along with continuing to practice of ānāpānasati – when I'm confronted with my feelings of liking and disliking, of craving and aversion?

First of all we must understand that it's natural that some people will practice very quickly. Others will practice less quickly. Some will practice slowly, some very slowly, and some won't be successful at all. If one practices in the right way, it goes very quickly. If one practices less correctly, then it goes more slowly.

We already mentioned the best way of practicing the other day. When in any situation, be aware that it's just the nervous system – that everything happening is just happening to and through the nervous system. There's no self. There's no attā, me or ego at all. This approach is the most straight-forward, it's the most direct. Whether [or not] the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind, recognize that it's merely the nervous system functioning – that there's no self or attā involved.

For example when there's liking or loving, see that it's just a feeling conditioned by the nervous system. Don't see it as being some self that loves or is the lover, the liker. Just see it as something concocted by the nervous system.

Walking without a walker is a good example of this lesson.

What is the difference between the process of intellectual understanding and full enlightened realization?

This is a matter of language. Native speakers of English will understand these words and their meaning better than I do. But my understanding of the English word 'intellect' means something that depends on reasoning. The intellect uses rational thought and reasoning to arrive at its understanding. And this can always go wrong. This is imperfect. However if it's a matter of intuition, it doesn't depend on reasoning, on rational thinking and so on. And when we speak of 'intuitive realization' or 'intuitive wisdom,' then that's a matter that's above reasoning, above rational thought. One just knows directly, without having to think about it. This is how we understand the words 'intellect' and 'intuition.' When we see 'intuition' we're meaning at the wisdom level, not just kind of emotional feelings or something.

The conclusion that comes from the intellect, from reasoning, can still be wrong. But the conclusion that comes from intuitive wisdom can never be wrong. If it's wrong, then it's not intuitive wisdom. So if it's direct immediate realization of something can never be wrong. If it's wrong, it's not direct immediate realization. However, intellectual conclusions, rational conclusions, can be wrong.

Could you elaborate on the relationship between science and the spiritual path within your teaching?

The path in Buddhism is one that does not depend on belief or faith. It depends on experiencing things directly as they are, to realizing the facts of things, realizing the causes, conditions, and results of those causes and conditions which exist in things. This is the path of Buddhism. It doesn't require belief... which is what science is about. Science is investigation of things without believing in anything but just dealing with the natural facts of things. So the Buddhist path is a scientific path. If you want to have any belief or faith in

Buddhism, it must come after there is this direct experience of the fact of things. When we know something, then we can believe in it.

Three words that are used by science are quite useful. There're absolutely correct. The words 'experiment,' 'research,' and 'prove.' If we use these three things correctly, then that will be very good for us.

(SK: I was asking him if he wanted a question on love or war or what. He said well it's good to talk about war.)

This war that is going on is happening because of selfishness on both sides. Because there is some kind of selfishness on both sides there will be war.

Even selfishness on one side can start a war.

We talk a lot about peace and not harming even the smallest living being. Unfortunately the world outside is not so peaceful as Suan Mokkh. Does Ajahn Buddhadasa think we can apply these rules on today's world when strong leaders terrorize millions of people? Can we overpower them in peaceful ways and good will?

(SK: I'll assume by 'rules' you mean 'the principles of Dhamma practice' we've been talking about, primarily about not-self and unselfishness. If that's incorrect, please correct me.)

The basic principle once again is unselfishness. If there is unselfishness, then there won't be these problems. For example, the person mentioned goodwill or kindness, even genuine love which in Buddhism is called *mettā* – this is just a form of unselfishness. For there to be genuine love or goodwill, there must be unselfishness. Stop a minute and look. If everyone was unselfish in this world, we wouldn't require prisons. We wouldn't require mental hospitals. We wouldn't require religious institutions, monasteries, ashrams and things like that. We wouldn't even require religion if there wasn't any selfishness.

In short, if there is no selfishness there is no need for religion. If there wasn't any selfishness you wouldn't have to come to Suan Mokkh.

(SK: Then I asked,)

Well how will we use this approach to stop powerful politicians who aren't above using force to harm and oppress many many people?

These kinds of leaders are selfish and they don't know what [un]selfishness is. Because they don't understand unselfishness, they must use force. They use very selfish methods.

(SK: Then I asked,)

Well what can we ourselves do about some of these powerful leaders? There are many of them in the world who enjoy using force.

We ourselves don't have the power to teach them. George Bush, Saddam Hussein, and all the other leaders of all your countries aren't listening to us and so we don't have the power to teach them. If there was some organization such as the UN who would teach this, maybe the message would get across. However the UN isn't very interested in this message. The UN doesn't seem to care. The United Nations doesn't seem to care very much about unselfishness. All they seem to be encouraging is competition.

It's kind of funny. God himself or herself wants that human beings will not be selfish. God himself wants us to be unselfish and he can't do anything about it. Even God can't stop us from being selfish. So what are we supposed to do?

And if God is too lazy to do anything about it, then we say, 'well then God is selfish.'

So please help spread the word that if there is no selfishness, we won't need religion, we won't need monasteries and ashrams, churches and synagogues. We won't need prisons, mental hospitals and courts or police or armies or any of that. If there wasn't selfishness, we wouldn't need any of these things. Please help to spread the word.

Nowadays we're so selfish that we can't build prisons, courts, and mental hospitals fast enough. Our selfishness is so big and fast that we can't keep up trying to build the hospitals, courts, and all these things to cope with the results of all our selfishness.

All the material development – the technological progress – that we worship so much these days, this just makes us more and more selfish. All of our development, our technology, our so-called progress which we worship and honor, this just creates more and more opportunities for selfishness – just keeps

making us more and more selfish. We use our intelligence, our science, not to solve human problems but to create new ones by further firing selfishness. Most of our universities and scientists spend their time thinking up new ways to promote selfishness. And so instead of really getting around to solving our problems, we just create bigger and bigger problems for ourselves. The result is then a world that's full of selfishness.

But to cut matters short, even if other people don't care about this – even if other people are going to continue being selfish – then we ourselves are going to stop being selfish. We ourselves are going to practice unselfishness. If they want to be selfish, well – the hell with them – let 'em, but we aren't going to be selfish any more.

If we aren't selfish, then who can kill us if there is no 'self' to be killed?

Buddhism deals with psychological matters – what we in the West call 'psychology.' And we have a set of terms in the West, in the psychological science. Now these are not always clear and not everybody agree about the terms. But the term of 'self' is a very used and very elaborated concept in psychology. But when we use the term 'self,' it is not only laden with negative propensities, also with positive things like behavior-regulating aspects. Now what happens if we learn to eliminate the self? That is fine with me regarding the selfish aspects. But what will regulate the positive aspects of the self, speaking along the lines I just did? I think you understand.

If you would like to have a self, then have it be a self which is unselfish. The basic instinct of self – the basic self instinct which is in all living things – this is not selfish. And then develop this basic instinct – the instinct to survive, the instinct to grow and develop – develop this with higher and higher wisdom until all selfishness is removed. Then we will have a psychology which is correct. If you want a self, have it be the self which is unselfish. Or – to put it most correctly – what this thing that you call 'self,' see that it isn't really a self. What is called a self, doesn't actually have the meaning or the reality of being a self. If there is that kind of self which is seen to actually be not-self, then this is the highest wisdom and there is no selfishness. This kind of self from which comes no selfishness, this is correct psychology.

Although this thing isn't a self – although it doesn't have any real self – it still has the wisdom, the intelligence within itself to solve problems. This thing naturally has the intelligence it needs to deal with and solve any problems, although that intelligence is not-self.

(SK: So we've used up more than two hours, so we'll call it quits at this time.)

Today it's been two and a half hours. We thank you for your great endurance.

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Transcribed by Arthur Brown in Feb. 2015

Audio files: 5125340209030.mp3 & 1991-02 (3) Dhamma questions and responses

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